

Zoning Code: 22 Landscaping Requirements



A DDES Customer Information Bulletin



King County Department of Development and Environmental Services
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<http://www.metrokc.gov/ddes/>

Frequently Asked Questions

King County DDES has created customer information bulletins to inform the general public about the effect of codes and regulations on their projects. These bulletins are not intended to be complete statements of all laws and rules and should not be used as substitutes for them. If conflicts and questions arise, current codes and regulations are the final authority. Because the codes and regulations may be revised or amended at any time, consult King County staff to be sure you understand all requirements before beginning work. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that each project meets all requirements of applicable codes and regulations.

Table of Contents

What is the purpose of landscaping requirements?	1
What areas are subject to the landscaping provisions of the Zoning Code?	2
Why does the Zoning Code encourage the use of native species in landscaping?	2
What types of landscaping are described in the Zoning Code?	3
What landscaping provisions pertain to surface parking areas?	6
What is width averaging?	6
Are alternative options allowed for landscaped areas?	6
What Zoning Code standards apply to all landscaped areas?	7
What is required for landscaping plans, plan review, and installation of landscaping?	7
What requirements pertain to maintaining landscaping after it is installed?	8
Are Financial Guarantees or other securities required for landscaping?	8
Where can I find more information?	9
Other bulletins and telephone numbers that may be helpful	9

This bulletin explains landscaping requirements as presented in Chapter 21A.16 of the King County Zoning Code. Graphic illustrations of the different types of landscaping are included for your review. If you need information pertaining to water use and irrigation systems, refer to Bulletin 19A, *Zoning Code: Irrigation System Requirements*.

What is the purpose of landscaping requirements?

Landscaping requirements were developed and have evolved over the years because of the many benefits associated with appropriate uses of landscaping within a community. Carefully designed landscaping can

Frequently Asked Questions

preserve the aesthetic character of communities or even improve the aesthetic quality of the built environment. Landscaping can screen undesirable views, interrupt the barren expanse of large parking lots, and relieve the scale of large buildings. Well-chosen landscaping can improve the compatibility between different types or intensities of land uses by providing a visual buffer. It can also deter erosion, promote native wildlife, allow for infiltration of surface water into groundwater resources, reduce the quantity of storm water discharge, and improve the quality of storm water discharge.

What areas are subject to the landscaping provisions of the Zoning Code?

Except for communication facilities, which are regulated by King County Code (KCC) Chapter 21A.26, all new development listed in KCC 21A.16.030 is subject to landscaping provisions. This includes residential development (single-family or attached/group residences), commercial development, industrial development, institutional development, and/or utility development. (See KCC 21A.16 for more information.)

Specific landscaping and tree retention provisions for uses established through a conditional use permit (CUP), a special use permit (SUP), or an urban planned development (UPD) application will be determined during the applicable review process.

The location and type of landscaping required for any particular site depends on adjacent zoning and development and on any property-specific, P-suffix, or special district overlay conditions. See KCC 21A.16.050 through KCC 21A.16.080 for specific information about landscaping required for the following:

- ◆ Street frontages
- ◆ Interior lot lines
- ◆ Surface parking areas
- ◆ Areas adjacent to freeway right-of-ways

Why does the Zoning Code encourage the use of native species in landscaping?

By definition, “native” species refers to those species that have not been introduced to our area recently, but have existed in the area for many centuries. These species usually do not need human intervention to grow or reproduce. Examples of native species include salal, Oregon grape, pacific madrone, pine, wild rose, mock orange, and huckleberry.

There are several reasons for wanting to retain and plant native species. These include the following:

- ◆ Northwest native plants tend to be drought-tolerant and well-adapted to the local climate of rainy winters and dry summers. Following an initial season or two of irrigation, many native species become established and have little or no need for additional irrigation beyond the water that comes from natural climate conditions. Native species such as the big-leaf maple have extensive root systems that help them tolerate and survive drought conditions. And, unlike the leaves of many deciduous trees, the leaves of conifers (cone-bearing trees such as pine) are coated with a waxy substance that reduces water loss.
- ◆ Retaining native species in-place in the landscaping prevents the disturbance of soil and, thus, provides good erosion control.

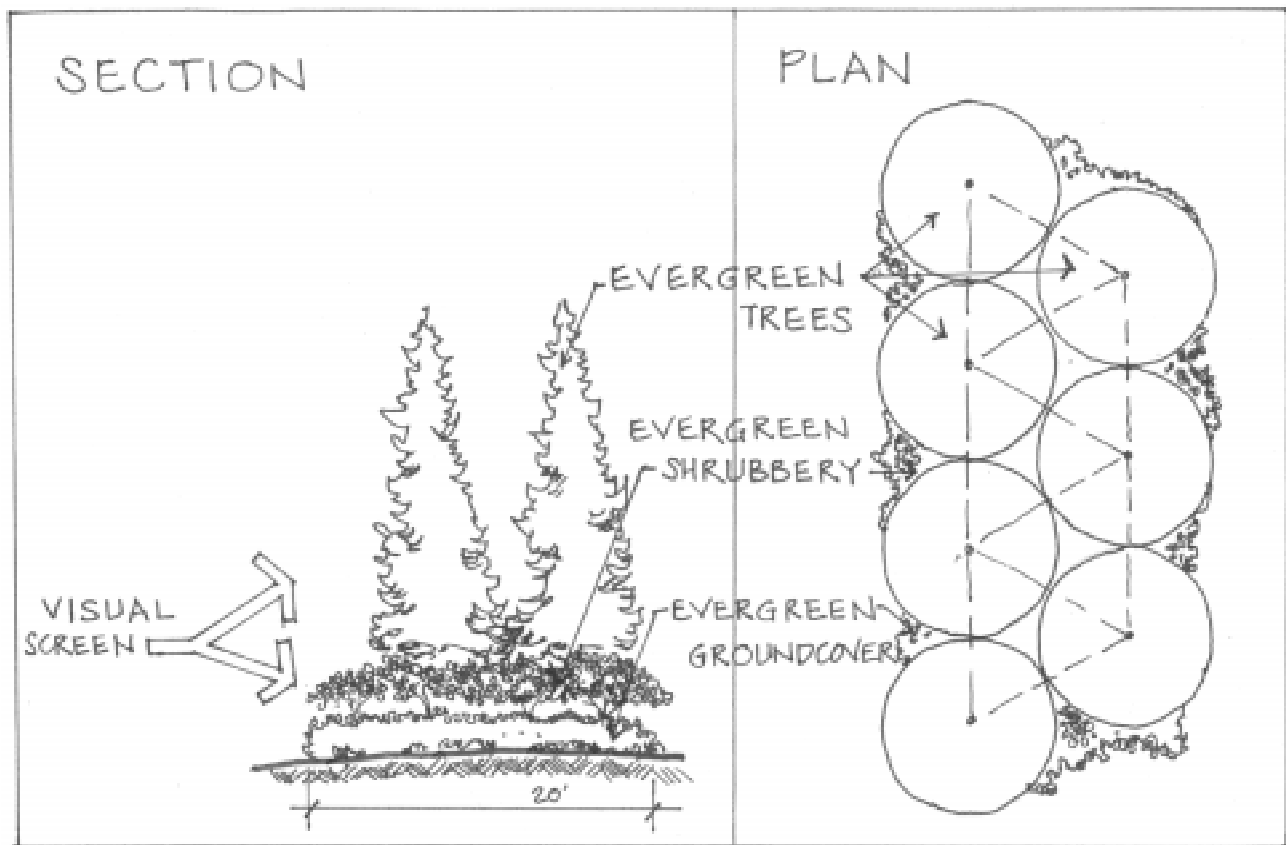
Frequently Asked Questions

- ◆ The native species typically do not require pesticides or fertilizers because they have developed natural ways to counteract insect attacks, avoid diseases, and adjust to low levels of nutrients through their evolutionary process.
- ◆ Native plants promote wildlife preservation by providing habitat, food, cover, and breeding areas.

What types of landscaping are described in the Zoning Code?

Depending on the land use for which your parcel is intended, and on adjacent properties and their uses, one of the following three types of landscaping will be required:

TYPE I LANDSCAPING (full screen)

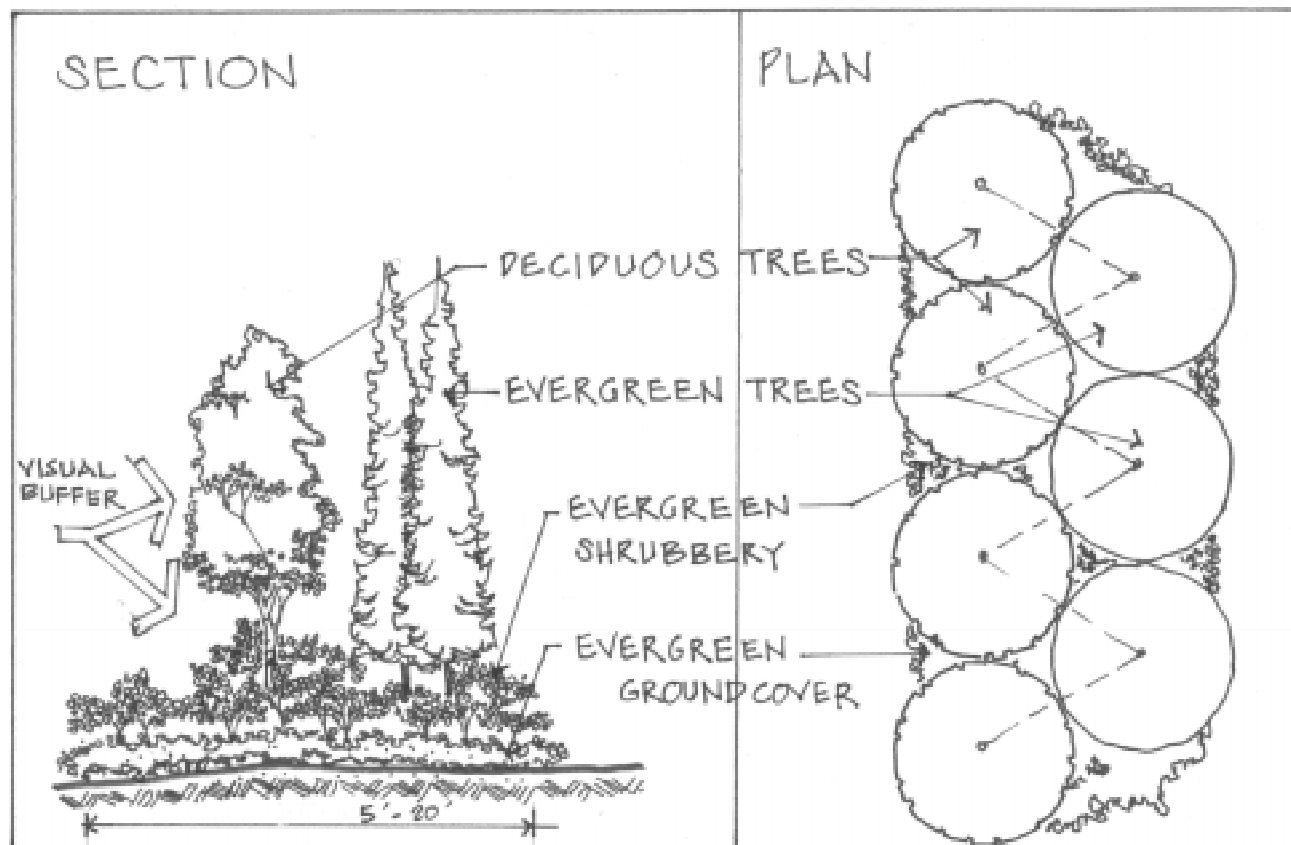


- ◆ Acts as a visual barrier
- ◆ Is typically found in the following places:
 - (1) Adjacent to freeways
 - (2) Between residential and nonresidential areas
- ◆ Minimally consists of the following:
 - (1) A mix of primarily evergreen trees and shrubs generally interspersed throughout the landscape strip, spaced to form a continuous screen
 - (2) Between 70 and 90 percent evergreen trees
 - (3) Trees provided at the rate of one per 10 linear feet of landscape strip and spaced no more than 30 feet apart on center

Frequently Asked Questions

- (4) Evergreen shrubs provided at the rate of one per four linear feet of landscape strip, and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
- (5) Ground cover, as specified in KCC 21A.16.090

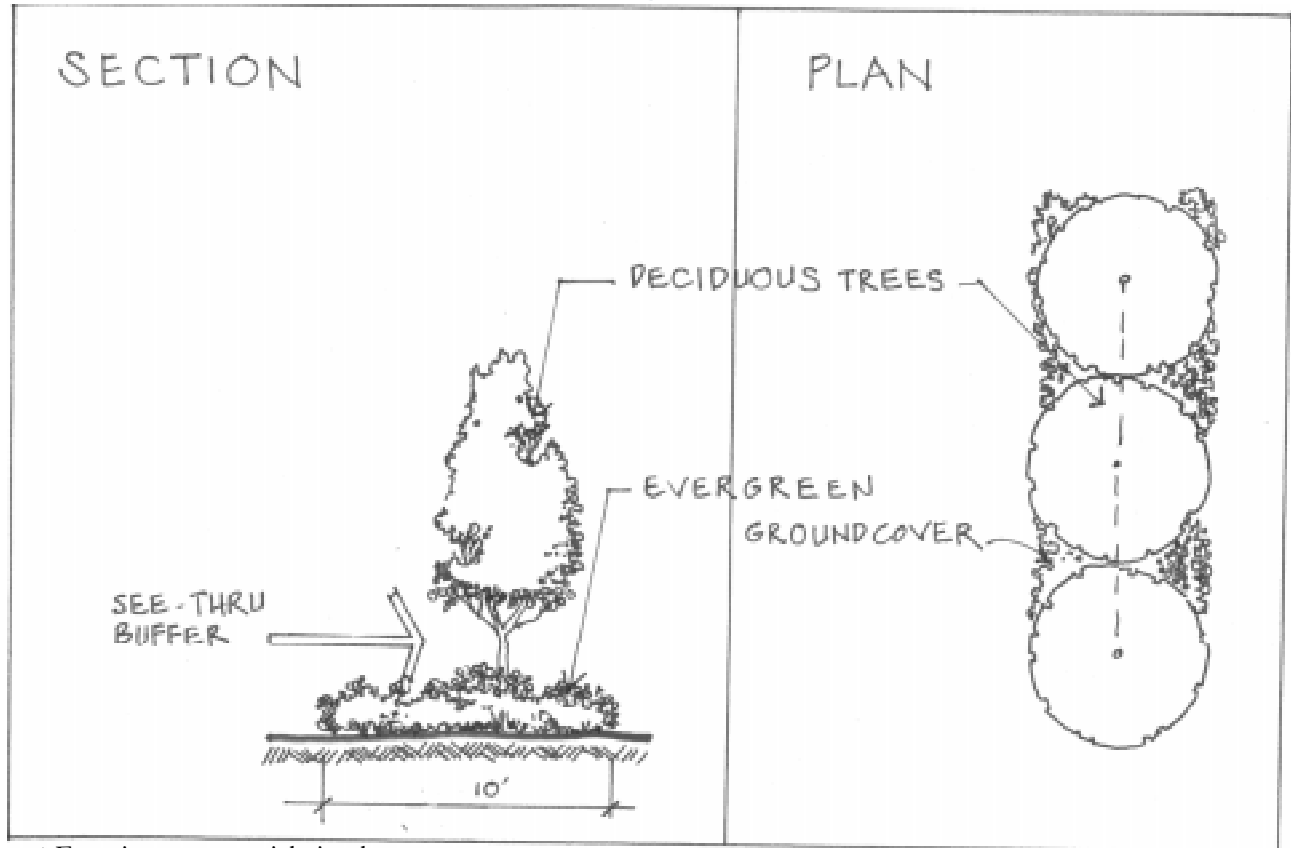
TYPE II LANDSCAPING (filtered screen)



- ◆ Functions as a visual separator
- ◆ Typically found or used:
 - (1) Between commercial and industrial uses
 - (2) Between differing types of residential development
 - (3) To screen industrial uses from the street
- ◆ Minimally consists of the following:
 - (1) A mix of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs generally interspersed throughout the landscape strip and spaced to create a filtered screen
 - (2) At least 50 percent deciduous trees and at least 30 percent evergreen trees
 - (3) Trees provided at the rate of one per 20 linear feet of landscape strip and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (4) Shrubs provided at the rate of one per four linear feet of landscape strip and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (5) Ground cover, as specified in KCC 21A.16.090

Frequently Asked Questions

TYPE III LANDSCAPING (see-through screen)



- ◆ Functions as a partial visual separator
- ◆ Softens the appearance of parking areas and building elevations
- ◆ Typically found in the following areas:
 - (1) Along street frontages
 - (2) Between apartment developments
- ◆ Minimally consists of the following:
 - (1) A mix of evergreen and deciduous trees generally interspersed throughout the landscape strip, and spaced to create a continuous canopy
 - (2) At least 70 percent deciduous trees
 - (3) Trees provided at the rate of one per 25 linear feet of landscape strip, and spaced no more than 30 feet apart on center
 - (4) Shrubs provided at the rate of one per 4 linear feet of landscape strip, and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (5) Ground cover, as specified in KCC 21A.16.090

Frequently Asked Questions

What landscaping provisions pertain to surface parking areas?

For surface parking areas with 10 or more parking stalls, parking area landscaping is required to provide shade and to diminish the visual effect of large paved areas. The amount of required landscaping varies with the type of development and typically includes the following:

- ◆ For residential developments with common parking areas, planting areas must be provided at the rate of 20 square feet per parking stall
- ◆ For commercial, industrial, or institutional developments, landscaping must be provided at the following rates:
 - (1) 20 square feet per parking stall when there are 10 to 30 parking stalls
 - (2) 25 square feet per parking stall when there are 31 or more parking stalls

Trees are required and must be distributed throughout the parking area at the following rate:

- ◆ For residential or institutional development, one tree for every 10 parking stalls
- ◆ For commercial or industrial development, one tree for every five parking stalls

In addition to the requirements mentioned above, the maximum distance between any parking stall and landscaping must be no more than 100 feet. Permanent curbs or structural barriers are also required to protect the plantings from vehicle overhang.

The types and dimensions of required landscaping are as follows:

- ◆ Canopy-type deciduous trees, evergreen trees, evergreen shrubs, and ground covers planted in islands or strips are required
- ◆ At least 70 percent of the trees must be deciduous
- ◆ Shrubs must not exceed a height of 42 inches
- ◆ Planting islands or strips are required in areas of at least 100 square feet each, with dimensions of no less than five feet
- ◆ Ground cover must meet the specifications outlined in KCC 21A.16.090
- ◆ Permanent curbs or structural barriers must be provided to protect plantings from vehicle overhang

What is width averaging?

The street and perimeter landscaping requirements in KCC Chapter 21A are stated in terms of “average” widths. This means that the actual width of a required landscape strip may vary to accommodate features in the landscape plan such as topography or existing vegetation. For example, if a 10-foot-wide landscape strip is required along 100 feet of property line, a total landscape area of 1,000 square feet must be provided. The width of the landscaping may vary in width from five to 15 feet, as long as the total area (in square footage) of landscaping remains the same.

Are alternative options allowed for landscaped areas?

The King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) may approve alternative landscaping options if they accomplish equal or better levels of screening when compared to the types of landscaping described above, or when existing conditions on or adjacent to the site cause strict application of

Frequently Asked Questions

zoning code standards to be ineffective. Existing conditions may include significant topographical differences, vegetation, structures, or utilities. Strict application of the Zoning Code occasionally results in obstructions in scenic views or other undesirable situations. Alternative options are sometimes allowed to preserve the historic character of a rural place, or to encourage the use of native species typically associated with the Puget Sound Basin. For an alternative landscape option to be approved, the applicant must show that a superior result can be achieved, and the option must be consistent with guidelines for alternatives, as outlined in KCC 21A.16.100.

What Zoning Code standards apply to all landscaped areas?

KCC 21A.16.085 contains the following general requirements that apply to all landscaping situations:

- ◆ The slope of berms is restricted to no more than two horizontal feet to each one vertical foot (2:1).
- ◆ For all new turf areas (except all-weather, sand-based athletic fields) a 2-inch-thick layer of organic material, cultivated a minimum of six inches deep, is required.
- ◆ A soil analysis must be conducted to measure the texture and organic content of the soil (five percent or more of organic content to a depth of six inches is required), as well as the pH and infiltration rate of the soil.
- ◆ All other areas must have enough organic content to provide adequate nutrients and moisture-retention.
- ◆ To minimize evaporation, two inches of mulch cover is required for all landscaped areas (except for turf or areas of established groundcover).
- ◆ Plants having similar water use characteristics must be grouped together in distinct hydrozones (areas containing plants that require similar amounts of water).
- ◆ Preservation of existing vegetation is encouraged. When selecting plants, consideration should be given to the plant's adaptability to the climate, geologic, and topographical conditions of the site.
- ◆ Landscaping along street frontages, interior lot lines, surface parking lots, and areas adjacent to freeway rights-of-way must conform to the grades and standards of the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN).

Landscaping in these areas must also meet requirements pertaining to dimensions and placement of single and multiple stemmed trees and shrubs, ground covers, fences, landscaping within rights-of-way, and use of indigenous (native) plant species. See KCC 21A.16.090 for specific information.

NOTE: Alternative landscaping options may be considered if they meet the specifications of KCC 21A.16.100.

What is required for landscaping plans, plan review, and installation of landscaping?

According to KCC 21A.16.115, a landscape plan is required and must be certified by a Washington State registered landscape architect, a Washington State certified nurseryman, or a Washington State certified landscaper. The plan must be drawn on the same base map as the development plans and must identify the following:

- ◆ The total landscape area and separate hydrozones
- ◆ The botanical/common names and applicable sizes of all landscape materials
- ◆ Property lines
- ◆ Impervious surfaces

Frequently Asked Questions

- ◆ Natural or man-made water features or bodies
- ◆ Existing or proposed structures, fences, and retaining walls
- ◆ Natural features or vegetation left in a natural state
- ◆ Designated recreational open-space areas

The professional who certifies the landscaping plan must also oversee its installation. Within 30 days of completed installation, this professional must submit a signed affidavit to DDES that verifies the landscaping has been installed according to the plan, unless the installed landscaping has already been inspected and accepted by DDES.

The required landscaping must be installed no later than three months after issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy for the project or project phase. The time limit for compliance may, however, be extended to allow installation of required landscaping during the next appropriate planting season.

What requirements pertain to maintaining landscaping after it is installed?

After landscaping is installed, the following requirements pertain to maintenance and upkeep:

- ◆ All landscaping must be maintained for the life of the project (see KCC 21A.16.180).
- ◆ All landscaping must be pruned and trimmed, as necessary, to maintain a healthy growing condition or to prevent primary limb failure.
- ◆ Diseased, damaged, or stolen plantings must be replaced within three months, or during the next planting season if the loss does not occur within a planting season (unless these plantings are retained to provide wildlife habitat).
- ◆ Landscaped areas must be kept free of trash.

Are Financial Guarantees or other securities required for landscaping?

Performance bonds or other appropriate securities are required for at least two years after planting or transplanting vegetation to ensure proper installation, establishment, and maintenance (See bulletins 40 and 40A through 40D for more information on Financial Guarantees).

Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I find more information?

If you still need additional information after reviewing this bulletin, contact staff at the DDES Zoning Counter at 206-296-6655 with zoning code questions that pertain to landscaping requirements.

Other bulletins and telephone numbers that may be helpful

Bulletin 1	Building and Development Permit Telephone Numbers
Bulletin 8	Commercial/Multifamily Building Permits
Bulletin 9	Obtaining a Residential Building Permit
Bulletin 12	The Residential Building Permit Process
Bulletin 17A	Zoning Code: Overview and Summary
Bulletin 18A	Zoning Code: Permitted Use Tables
Bulletin 19A	Zoning Code: Irrigation System Requirements
Bulletin 21	Sensitive Areas Review
Bulletin 25	Short Subdivisions
Bulletin 40	Financial Guarantees
Bulletin 40A	Financial Guarantees for Residential Permits
Bulletin 40B	Financial Guarantees for Commercial Permits
Bulletin 40C	Financial Guarantee for Grading
Bulletin 40D	Financial Guarantees for Subdivision Approvals

206-296-6600	DDES Permit Center
206-296-6655	DDES Zoning Information



King County complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you require an accommodation to attend a meeting (two weeks' notice) or require this information in Braille, audiocassette, or large print, please call 206-296-6693 or TTY 206-296-7217.